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PROBABLE CONSEQUENCES  
OF THE EGYPTIAN ARMS DEAL  
WITH THE SOVIET BLOC

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## PROBABLE CONSEQUENCES OF THE EGYPTIAN ARMS DEAL WITH THE SOVIET BLOC

### THE PROBLEM

To estimate, in the light of the recent Egyptian arms deal with the Soviet Bloc: (a) the likelihood of Israeli or Egyptian-instigated hostilities assuming no change in present US policy; (b) the effect of certain possible US courses of action on the situation; and (c) the outlook for Soviet exploitation of this and possible similar deals with other Arab states.

### CONCLUSIONS

1. The Soviet-Egyptian arms deal has substantially increased the risk that Israel will launch a "preventive war." Such Israeli action is not likely within the next few weeks. The Israelis will probably wish to determine more precisely the magnitude of the threat posed by Soviet Bloc willingness to arm the Arabs, to exploit the favorable trend of Western public opinion, and, most importantly, to determine how far Israel can realistically depend on Western and particularly US support in maintaining its territorial integrity. In the absence of convincing evidence of Western determination to preserve the territorial status quo, there is very real danger that Israel will undertake "preventive war," possibly in the next few months, and it would almost certainly be more willing to take risks which could touch off a new round of hostilities. An Israeli "preventive war" may start in the form of border raids where responsibilities and intentions may initially be obscure. (Paras. 11-13)

2. If it became unmistakably clear to both sides that the US was prepared to

use any means necessary, including military force, to halt aggression, it is almost certain that no "second round" would develop. However, if the US declined to guarantee the territorial status quo in a new and more direct pledge than that contained in the Tripartite Declaration, it would be extremely difficult to deter Israeli preventive action, since neither the Israelis nor the Arabs would be likely to believe that the US would in fact intervene effectively against Israel. (Para. 16)

3. Assuming that it is actually implemented, the arms deal is likely to strengthen a tendency toward Egyptian militancy, and increase the danger that local clashes will develop into large-scale fighting. However, pending absorption of the new equipment Egypt will probably feel constrained to avoid serious difficulties with Israel. Over the longer run, the growth of Egyptian military strength will almost certainly stimulate some Egyptian interest in a "second round" against Israel. (Paras. 8, 14-15)

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4. Should a "second round" occur in the near future, in which the US simply let events take their course, an Israeli victory would be almost certain. Under these circumstances Israeli ability to seize and hold considerable portions of all its neighbors' territories would be limited largely by its lack of reserve supplies and the probability of UK intervention if Jordan were invaded. The effects of a "hands off" policy on the part of the US would have an extremely adverse effect on its position in the Arab world and would retard US efforts to build indigenous Middle East defense. (*Paras. 18-19*)

5. A convincing indication of US determination to intervene effectively in the event of aggression would reassure both sides. Nevertheless, the Arabs would regard it primarily as a guarantee of Israel's present position. Arab resentment

would in time increase, particularly if growing Arab military capabilities placed the Arabs in the position of the ones being restrained. (*Para. 17*)

6. Soviet arms aid to Egypt will complicate if not block the achievement of two major US objectives in the Middle East: an Arab-Israeli settlement and the creation of effective regional defense arrangements against Communism. It is likely to stimulate neutralist tendencies in Egypt and other Arab states, and to enhance the capabilities of local Communists for subversion and political penetration. Although we believe that the RCC is determined to avoid close political alignment with the Soviets, increasing military and economic dependence on the Bloc might eventually deprive it of some of its freedom to choose its orientation. (*Paras. 20-23*)

## DISCUSSION

### I. THE ARMS DEAL AND ITS MILITARY IMPLICATIONS

7. On 21 September 1955 the Soviet Bloc agreed to furnish in exchange for Egyptian cotton a supply of arms at bargain rates which, according to the Egyptians, includes 200 jet fighters and light bombers; 100 "heavy" tanks; 6 motor torpedo boats; and 2 submarines — and all together with necessary spare parts. An initial shipment of 37 light jet bombers and 63 MIG-15's is reportedly to be delivered by December 1955 and the 100 tanks are to be delivered at an unspecified early date. The Egyptians indicated that Bloc technicians would be made available over a 90-day period to instruct the Egyptians in maintenance and operation.

8. Assuming that the Bloc actually supplies these items, in terms of military hardware alone the deal would: (a) give Egypt marked qualitative and quantitative superiority in

combat aircraft over Israel, which is already inferior in numbers of aircraft to the Arab states as a group; (b) significantly reduce Israel's present numerical superiority in tanks; and (c) furnish Egypt with means of harassing Israel's shipping. Some of the equipment will probably be placed in operation within a few months after delivery. However, it is estimated that even under optimum conditions, involving large Bloc training missions over an extended period, at least a year would probably be required after delivery before most of the equipment could be effectively used in unit operations.

### II. THE EFFECT ON ISRAELI COURSES OF ACTION

9. The arms deal constitutes a severe psychological blow to Israel. At a minimum it will in time make the Egyptians more able and willing to stand up to or retaliate against Israeli military raids, thereby lessening the likeli-

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hood that Israel's activist raiding tactics will force the Arabs to make peace. At a maximum it brings materially closer the spectre of a growth of Arab military strength which would leave Israel incapable of defending itself effectively. Although the Israelis probably recognize that the military effects of the arms deal will not be immediately felt, they probably believe that they have only limited time to adjust to the situation.

10. These considerations are almost certainly stimulating increasing pressures within Israel for a bolder and more aggressive effort to resolve the basic problem of security once and for all. The Israeli government has responded with strong pressures on the US for compensating arms aid and for a specific security guarantee, and it will almost certainly make additional efforts, within the relatively narrow limits of its potential resources, to procure arms elsewhere if they are not available from the US. Meanwhile, Israel is almost certainly canvassing the possibilities of military solutions. Prime Minister-designate Ben Gurion had previously announced that Israel will take forcible measures if necessary to end the Egyptian blockade of the sea route to Elath on the Gulf of Aqaba. The Israeli General Staff, which recommended expulsion of the Egyptians from the Gaza strip a few months ago, is probably pressing for at least limited territorial advances for the purposes of eliminating trouble spots and otherwise improving Israel's position at tactically vulnerable places along the border. Moreover, consideration is probably being given to the merits of a "preventive war" while Israel still holds a decisive military edge.

11. The Soviet-Egyptian arms deal has substantially increased the risk that Israel will launch a "preventive war." It is unlikely, however, that Israel will initiate such action in the next few weeks. Before committing themselves to an outright war policy, the Israelis will probably wish to determine more precisely the magnitude of the threat posed by Soviet Bloc willingness to arm the Arabs, to exploit the favorable trend of Western public opinion, and, more importantly, to deter-

mine how far Israel can realistically depend on Western and particularly US support in maintaining its territorial integrity.

12. Particularly if the prospects of UN and Western counteraction in curbing incidents are uncertain, we believe that Israel, in its present mood, will almost certainly be more disposed than before the arms deal to take chances in execution of its activist policies. Such a move might touch off a new round of large-scale hostilities, whether by design or otherwise. Israel's proposed move to force the Gulf of Aqaba might prove such a stepping stone to war, as might also an Israeli move to intercept arms shipments to Egypt or resumption of the work to divert the Jordan waters in the demilitarized zone at Jisr Banat Yacub on the Syrian border. Should Israel find itself engaged in major clashes with one of the Arab states it would probably be increasingly disposed to take advantage of the situation to seize the troubled area or otherwise improve its tactical position. Should the intervention of other Arab states appear to be in the offing it would probably attempt to seize the initiative and in so doing make a general conflict inevitable.

13. Moreover, in the absence of convincing evidence of Western determination to preserve the territorial status quo, there is very real danger that Israel will undertake a "preventive war," possibly within the next few months. The Egyptian arms deal, particularly if followed up by a similar deal with Syria, threatens Israel with an arms race which it cannot afford to sustain with its own resources and which ultimately threatens to leave it incapable of defending itself effectively. Unless Israel obtains countervailing arms aid or a new and more direct US pledge of prompt and effective military intervention to preserve the territorial status quo than is now provided in the Tripartite Declaration, it is likely to conclude that war offers the only way out. Under such circumstances, Israel is also likely to play down the possibility of effective Western intervention against a "preventive war" by Israel, which the latter would portray as a defensive reaction to Arab ag-

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gression inspired and armed by the Soviet Union and which was accompanied by offers to negotiate a firm peace. An Israel "preventive war" may start in the form of border raids where responsibilities and intentions may initially be obscure.

### III. EFFECT ON EGYPTIAN COURSES OF ACTION

14. We believe that Egypt's acceptance of Bloc arms has been motivated far less by thoughts of a "second round" than by: (a) the necessity to shore up armed forces morale; (b) an acute sense of vulnerability to Israeli military harassment and possible invasion; and (c) its desire to follow through on its announced policy of independence from both great power blocs. However, the arms deal, assuming that it is actually implemented, is likely to strengthen a tendency toward greater militancy vis-a-vis Israel already manifest in the Egyptian government's recent sponsorship of commando operations in the Gaza area. This will increase the danger that local clashes will develop into large-scale fighting. For the immediate future, the Egyptian regime will probably feel constrained to avoid serious difficulties with Israel, pending the arrival of the new equipment and the training of combat-effective units. However, even during this interim period the difficulty of holding Egyptian local commanders and troops in check will probably create increased hazards of a flareup.

15. Over the longer run, the growth of Egyptian military strength will almost certainly stimulate some Egyptian interest in a "second round" against Israel. Although the RCC regime has manifested concern over the fact that Israeli possession of the Negev cuts Egypt off from land communication with the other Arab states, it has no territorial ambitions of its own in Israel, will probably retain a healthy respect for Israeli combat effectiveness, and — despite its attempts to free itself from dependence on the West — will probably remain fearful of Western sanctions. Assuming that Egypt believes itself greatly strengthened by Soviet arms and support, it might be tempted to make war on Israel as a

means of solidifying its leadership in the Arab world. While the deterrents mentioned are likely to prevent such action, at least in the near future, Egypt will almost certainly do its best to impress the Israelis with its will and ability to defend its interests and may therefore end up with fully as aggressive and activist a policy as that now being pursued by Israel.

### IV. CONSEQUENCES OF A STRENGTHENING OF US POLICY REGARDING INTERVENTION

16. If it became unmistakably clear to both sides that the US was prepared to use any means necessary, including military force, to halt aggression, it is almost certain that no "second round" would develop. However, if the US declined to guarantee the territorial status quo in a new and more direct pledge than that contained in the Tripartite Declaration of 1950, it would be extremely difficult to deter Israeli preventive action since neither the Israelis nor the Arabs would be likely to believe that the US would in fact intervene effectively against Israel.

17. A convincing indication of US determination to intervene effectively in the event of aggression would reassure both sides. Nonetheless, the Arabs would regard it primarily as a guarantee of Israel's present position. Over the long run, the concept of the US as a policeman, even if backed by the UN, would be a source of increasing Arab resentment, particularly if increasing Arab military capabilities placed the Arabs in the position of the ones being restrained.

### V. PROBABLE CONSEQUENCES OF A US "HANDS OFF" POLICY IN RESPONSE TO AN ISRAELI ATTACK

18. If aggressive Israeli action should lead in the near future to a "second round," in which the US stood aside and let developments take their course, all the Arab League states would almost certainly become involved, and an Israeli victory would almost certainly be the outcome. Against Arab opposition alone, we estimate that Israel could now seize all of Arab-controlled Palestine, portions of Egyptian,

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Syrian, and Lebanese territory contiguous to Israel, and some Jordanian territory east of the Jordan River. Israel would probably have to reckon with UN intervention. However, the most important limitations to Israel's ability to consolidate these gains would be its own lack of reserve supplies and the probability that the UK, because of its special treaty obligations, would feel compelled to intervene, at least with air and naval forces, if Jordan were invaded. Egypt's capabilities would be substantially improved if it could actually employ Soviet Bloc military personnel in using its new weapons against Israel. However, it appears unlikely that the USSR, under present circumstances, would be willing to accept the risks of hostilities with the West which such a move would involve. A defeat of the Arabs would probably be followed by a period of disorder in one or more of the Arab states, a condition which the USSR would almost certainly attempt to exploit.

19. A "hands off" policy on the part of the US would have an extremely adverse effect on its position in the Arab world, and would retard US efforts to build indigenous Middle East defense.

## VI. PROBABLE SOVIET OBJECTIVES AND PROSPECTS FOR SUCCESS

20. The arms deal with Egypt represents the most dramatic move in a Soviet campaign in the Middle East which has been under way for some time. A major objective of this campaign is almost certainly to stiffen Arab resistance to Western policies in the area, particularly the efforts of the US and UK to develop anti-Communist defense arrangements and to retain their bases. Since the signing of the Baghdad Pact,<sup>1</sup> Egypt has led Arab opposition to Western defense efforts, and Syria and Saudi Arabia, the other recipients of Soviet arms offers, have been Egypt's chief supporters. Moreover, the USSR almost certainly appreciates that US-UK difficulties in creating a defense system will be seriously increased: (a) by any heightening of Arab-Israeli tensions; (b) by the Western Powers

<sup>1</sup>Turkey, Iraq, the UK, and Pakistan are now members of this pact.

losing the advantage of being the only significant source of arms for the Arab states; and (c) by invidious comparisons in Arab minds between the spectacular amount and easy terms of Soviet aid promised to Egypt, and the relative handful of materiel which Iraq has been receiving as a member in good standing of the "northern tier" group of nations.

21. In addition to its usefulness in undermining Western defense efforts in the area, the USSR probably regards the arms deal as a means of strengthening neutralist tendencies in Egypt and other Arab states, if only by weakening their dependence on the West and increasing Soviet bargaining power. Egypt's decision to accept arms from the Bloc in exchange for cotton, together with recent agreements for substantially increased barter trade in nonmilitary items, would probably increase Egyptian reliance on the Orbit for continuing training needs and maintenance supplies and possibly as a market for Egypt's primary export item. Finally, the Soviets probably will see increased opportunities for subversion and political penetration, not only through increased Soviet influence, but also through the introduction of Soviet technical and commercial personnel in the Arab states.

22. We believe that the RCC is determined to avoid any kind of close alignment with the Soviet Bloc. It is most unlikely that Egypt would pay a price for Soviet arms in the form of any kind of political commitments when it has been unwilling to pay such a price for Western arms. The same apprehensive, suspicious nationalism that caused Egypt to reject alignment with the West in a Middle East defense organization will probably work with equal force against any efforts of the Soviets to obtain a special position in Egypt. Should Egypt become increasingly dependent on the Bloc economically and militarily, and at the same time more isolated from the West, it might eventually lose some of its freedom to choose its orientation.

23. On the other hand, Soviet chances for fostering Egyptian neutralism are more promising and immediate. Strong neutralist tendencies already exist within the RCC and

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among its supporters. Egyptian receipt of Soviet arms aid is likely to strengthen this inclination, particularly since Soviet aid will raise Egyptian hopes of the advantages to be derived from playing off the Soviets and the West against each other. Initially at least, indigenous Communist standing will be improved by Egyptian acceptance of Soviet Bloc aid.

24. At present, the RCC regime probably overestimates its ability to handle both the short and longer-range risks of accepting the Soviet arms offer. The sheer technical problems of assembling and maintaining the relatively modern materiel involved, quite aside from training Egyptian personnel to use it effectively, will place the regime under strong compulsions to admit greater numbers of Bloc technicians and training personnel for longer periods than it probably now thinks will be necessary. Having acquired the arms, Nasr will be reluctant to close Egypt's doors to the personnel needed to make them useful. Particularly if the USSR itself and the Bloc representatives sent to Egypt are careful at the outset to avoid the appearance of having political or subversive designs, this reluctance will become even greater. And if Israel should continue to provoke and frighten the regime by activist policies on the border, the pressures to seek Bloc technical and military help would be great. This, in turn, would lead to increased Soviet bargaining power and opportunities for penetration, with consequent advantages to long-term Soviet political goals. Similarly, growing economic dependence on the Bloc as a market for Egyptian cotton might give the USSR increased power to influence Egypt either by threats or inducements. In accord with its current policy of relaxation of tensions, the USSR will probably be very circumspect in its relations with Egypt in order to encourage nations around the periphery of the Communist Bloc to adopt a neutralist course as an inexpensive and, indeed, profitable means of assuring their independence and security.

25. Egyptian acceptance of Bloc arms and assertion of an "independent foreign policy" has made a profound impression in other Arab

states and increases the chances that Syria would accept a Soviet arms offer. In view of the basic instability of the Syrian political situation, the greater potential of the well-organized Syrian Communist Party (whose leader is a member of Parliament), and the strength of leftist elements in the army, the possibilities of an increasingly leftist course in Syria are considered greater.

26. Saudi Arabia's resistance to Bloc penetration is probably much greater than Syria's and the chances of its accepting large-scale Bloc arms aid may be considered less. However, its increasing conflict with the UK and the strong feelings of the ruling family regarding the threat from Hashemite Iraq and from Israel would incline the Saudi government to help finance Arab arms deals from whichever source as long as Arab capabilities against Israel are thereby strengthened and/or Iraq's plans for hegemony among the Arab states checked.

## VII. BY-PRODUCTS

27. Apart from the improved prospects for local Communists and the encouragement to neutralism in the Middle East arising from the Soviet-Egyptian arms deal, it is possible that the USSR has in view the development of further contentions and difficulties in the Middle East. The appearance of a leftist trend in Syria, for example, would probably bring heavy pressures on the US and UK from Turkey and Iraq to permit intervention in Syria before the situation became irretrievable. This might confront the West with the choice of either permitting a serious increase in inter-Arab tensions or imperilling the Baghdad Pact structure. Furthermore, the greatly increased danger of arms races and armed conflicts in the area resulting from the deal is likely both to set one part of the Arab world against the other and the Arab world as a whole against Israel. The fact that these basic cleavages in effect run at cross-purposes to each other is likely merely to add to the confusion and to the prospects of general deterioration that would probably offer much greater long run advantages to international

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Communism than would the pursuit by the Arab states of neutralist policies. It is possible that the USSR will attempt both to exploit the "spirit of Geneva" and to disrupt the Western position in the Middle East by offering cancellation of the Egyptian arms deal in

return for US withdrawal from the Dhahran base and the abandonment of British military arrangements with Jordan and Iraq. The USSR might also propose a stabilization of the Arab-Israeli situation by a quadripartite (US, UK, France, USSR) guarantee.

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